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FOUR STATES SELECTED FOR 2003 MIDDLE-GRADES REFORM PROGRAM

Each state to identify its "schools to watch"

Newton, MA – In its continuing effort to replicate the programs and practices of outstanding middle schools, the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform has selected four states to implement its acclaimed “Schools to Watch” program. The Forum will train teams of state leaders to choose Schools to Watch in **Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, and Virginia**. The states were chosen after a competitive selection process in which teams from each state demonstrated the capacity, commitment, and vision to partner with the Forum to establish the program.

The states join California, North Carolina, and Georgia, which were selected last year, and have since chosen exceptional middle-grades schools in each of their own states as "schools to watch." As a result of their selection last year, these states have been using the Schools to Watch criteria to help more schools become high performing.

The National Forum co-sponsors the Schools to Watch State Program with the National Association for Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Middle School Association, and National Staff Development Council.

Launched in 1999, Schools to Watch began as a national program that identified four middle-grades schools that were not only academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable, but also had the organizational supports to sustain the school's success. Members of the National Forum selected the schools based on the extent to which they met a number of demanding criteria and data which Forum observers collected during site visits. Following the selections, the four schools were inundated with calls and flooded with visitors interested in seeing middle-grades schools that work and using the criteria for their own staff development and school assessments. The Forum web site (<http://www.schoolstowatch.org>) features online tours of the schools and detailed information about the selection criteria.

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In today's announcement, the National Forum selected Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, and Virginia to replicate the Schools to Watch program as a way to identify exemplary middle-level schools in each state. Different education organizations have taken the lead in each state, but all four states proved to the Forum review team that they have already garnered significant support for middle-grades school improvement and are mobilizing a number of in-state resources to carry out this program. All four will receive technical training and support from the Forum to implement their Schools to Watch programs.

“Our Schools to Watch program has helped schools across the country to learn specific ways to promote academic excellence for all students, while responding to the unique developmental needs of young adolescents,” said Joan Lipsitz, Chair of the Forum’s Schools to Watch committee which made the selections. “We’ve had great success implementing the program at the state level, and we're excited that a growing number of schools will be able to teach others about excellent and equitable programs uniquely suited to middle-level students,” Lipsitz said.

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform is an alliance of educators, researchers, national associations, and officers of professional organizations and foundations, dedicated to improving education in the middle grades. The Forum seeks to improve student learning dramatically by advocating that schools provide strong academics, respond to students' needs and interests, and ensure equal access to high-quality classes. To learn more, visit www.mgforum.org.